

137 bound by innumerable ties to a countryside richer and fuller
 [262] than that of to-day. Thus birch, rowan, hazel, thorn, sally
 and holly all had their special purposes, and yew was in great
 demand for croziers and shrines. So we might go on down to
 the humblest lichen (for crottle dye) and the seaweed (Chapter
 16). Bog timber, oak and "fir," had many uses—for
 furniture and implements, for roofs, gates, slide-cars and boat-
 timber as well as for fir ropes and lighting "splits." Super-
 stitious customs are associated with several of the native trees,
 especially the rowan, the ash, hazel and whitethorn (Chap. 18).

Sycamore and beech, neither of them native to Ireland,
 have been extensively planted in recent centuries and grow
 so well that many have assumed them to be indigenous.
 The beech loves the well-drained moraines, while the sycamore,
 one of the few trees which will stand up to the full force of
 [351] the salt-laden winds, is planted in coastal districts for the
 shelter it provides: behind its dense summer foliage many a
 low cabin lies hidden. Its white easily-worked timber is
 sought by the wood-turner. Formerly the beetling engines
 of the linen country made a demand for beech and sycamore—
 the former for the beaters and the latter for the great beam.
 On steep hillsides which man has been unable to utilize one
 may still see patches of what may be regarded as wild scrub,
 a tangle of hazel, ash, black and white thorn, or birch, rowan
 and alder; but apart from the high-walled demesnes where
 giant trees are allowed to grow old and rot, the Irish landscape
 137 is singularly bare of timber. Visitors from England will
 notice the poor development of hedgerow trees except for the
 ash of Co. Meath. This must be attributed largely to the fact
 that hedge trees have to grow in raised banks or "ditches,"
 as they are called. Hedges and trees are very rarely planted
 on the level, for the ditch-tradition is older than the hedge.
 To quote Young once more: "I never saw a single capital
 tree growing on these banks." But there is some compen-
 sation, in autumn, in the wealth of blackberries which they
 produce (Fig. 10).

137 Travellers of the early 19th century constantly refer to
 311 landscapes without a single tree or shrub or any trace of

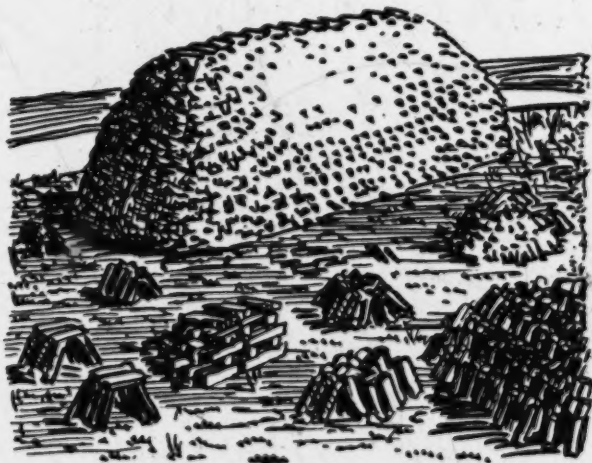
9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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walks backwards, bare-footed, during this process of "running," dipping his hands from time to time in a bucket of water to clean them. The great slab of notched turf then resembles a huge tray of treacle toffee. The brick-like slabs, some 12 inches by 4, are later cut out with a sharp flat turf spade or a hay-knife, and go through the usual processes of footing, clamping and stacking. 314



Turf stack, footings, castles, spread turf, etc. Co. Antrim.

Fig. 93.

We must now consider briefly the uses made of bog timber, chiefly "fir" (Scots pine), oak and birch. The great fir stumps are cleaved with a heavy fir-hatchet, from 5 to as much as 14 pounds in weight (Fig. 92). A "lifter" of rather unusual type is also illustrated. The resinous wood makes excellent firing and kindling, but the toughest stumps defy the axe and their twisted roots make a convenient substitute for a gate or a stop-gap. Straight-grained fir was much in demand for making "splits," that is thin strips used for lighting purposes and for making the rims and bottoms of sieves. 313
[413]

313 In the north long splits were twisted into fir-rope, a craft which is almost dead (Fig. 21 and Chapter 14). Both fir and oak were employed for constructional work of all kinds: old cabins will be found to be roofed with bog timber in most districts, and many implements, dressers, settles, stools, churns, tubs, slide-cars and even boats were fashioned from it. The buried trunks are located in winter by seeking frost-free patches on the bog-surface, or on summer mornings by noting where the dew lies thinnest. Their size and soundness are tested with an iron probing rod or "bog auger" and if satisfactory the trunks are then dug out.

491 Much might be said about the bog roads and means of access to the turf. In Armagh and Monaghan, to quote Mr. T. G. F. Paterson, the track or "car-path" by which the turf is carted home is called the "rampar" or "turf-pad," the rampar being the standing strip of bog preserved between cuttings. The various methods of tenure and rights of turbary are an interesting topic but a notorious source of trouble, and the Irish peasant finds ample opportunity for indulging his litigious tastes in disputes over drainage and rights of way.

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FARMYARDS AND FENCES

one see a well-kept or neatly trimmed field-hedge and never a staked and pleached hedgerow to compare with those of the English lowlands. The whole art of hedging is poorly developed, and the craft of laying a hedge almost unknown. The thorns are allowed to grow freely—as though they were the true fairy thorns which must never be damaged—and cut back ruthlessly at long intervals, when the many gaps are stuffed with dead thorns. The truth is that it is the bank rather than the hedge which makes the fence, and the thorns do little more than provide some shelter for livestock. But while the earthen banks grow tall hedges they will not support good hedgerow timber. The few starved ashes, sycamores or stunted beeches compare very unfavourably with the great oaks and elms of the English Midlands. Arthur Young brought his English common sense and prejudices to bear on the subject: 'To permit a hedge to grow too long without cutting not only ruins it for a fence but spoils the trees that are planted with it . . . I never saw a single capital tree growing on these banks.' And consequently, 'the greatest part of the kingdom presents a naked bleak dreary view for want of wood.'¹ Elsewhere he writes, of Mitchelstown in Co. Cork, 'An oak, an ash, or an elm is almost as great a rarity as an olive, an orange or a mulberry.'² 351

The planting of hedges and hedgerow timber had been advocated by improvers since the sixteenth century. The Ordinances for the Government of Ireland (1534) lay down that 'every husbandman having a plough within the English Pale shall set by the year twelve ashes in the ditches and closes of his farm'. The ditch-bank was evidently already a feature of the farms in the Pale, and it is interesting that there, as generally through the east and north of the country, the ash—providing the most useful timber for general farm use—is the favourite hedgerow tree. But it is in the closes (the farmyards) that one sees most trees today, chief among them the sycamore whose dense foliage gives protection from the winds and from the prying eyes of neighbours. Next to the sycamore in popularity, and similarly providing a thick cover, come the beech and the conifers, and it is noteworthy that none of these species is 351
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¹Arthur Young, *Tour*, 2, part 2, 66

²*ibid.*, 2, 272.

FARMYARDS AND FENCES

351 native to the country. Around the coasts the sycamore is almost
313 the only tree that persists, for it will stand up to the salt-laden
gales everywhere save on the most exposed parts of the west
coast. R. U. Sayce has recorded the belief, from Montgomery-
shire, that 'sycamore trees keep the fairies away and stop them
spoilng the milk',¹ but this bit of lore cannot be of any great
antiquity since the tree did not reach Britain from its home in
the mountain belt of southern Europe until the sixteenth
century. It presumably arose from the association of the tree
with the farmyard. In Ireland the sycamore probably came in
with the early seventeenth century planters, though the beech
may be a medieval or even older introduction. Both trees had
many economic uses, especially for dry-coopering, that is the
[322] manufacture of provision casks and butter firkins, and the
sycamore is an excellent wood for turnery. Later, as the linen
industry became mechanized, the beetling mills demanded
sycamore for the great beam of the engine and beech for the
vertical beetles.

351 The lay-out of farm buildings seems to have been, in the
361 native single-farms, as haphazard and formless as was that of
the houses themselves in an old clachan. As separate farms with
outbuildings ('offices') became fashionable improvements after
the middle of the eighteenth century, the latter were built for
convenience of access and they were put close to the farmhouse,
either attached to one end or lying parallel to provide a wind-
break. Only in the planted areas does one find old examples of
planned 'courtyard farms' where the house and offices enclose a
square or rectangular yard. I fancy the stone or wooden 'hovel-
stands' with their picturesque mushroom-like staddle-stones are
also confined to planted districts. In the west a favourite method
of making stacks is to build them about a central pole. (See p. 164.)

487 The wayside style is another absentee in the native Irish
countryside, as is the footpath which is its companion. Short-
[417] cuts are rarely worth while in a land of tiny fields, and if there
is a right of way there is sure to be a tolerable road. In fact
there are so many farm lanes and access ways to mountain,
seashore or bog that an economist might regard the amount of
land so taken out of cultivation as excessive. It has been

¹R. U. Sayce, *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 40 (1938).

TURF AND SLANE

averaging some twenty feet, and they have had a far longer life. In their natural condition their surface is slightly convex, and they may come to stand, perversely, above the level of the surrounding countryside, though they began life in ill-drained hollows where reeds grew to make fen-peat. These lower layers tend to be alkaline in nature and when the upper layers are cut away the bogs may be turned into productive cropland if adequate drainage can be provided. Small areas of this type occur to the south of Lough Neagh, but Ireland has nothing to compare with the English fenlands. Yet the Irish bogs take their place in the agricultural economy as summer grazing grounds, formerly for mixed stock and for cattle in particular, latterly mainly for sheep. In the past, too, considerable use was made of buried timber dug from the bogs,¹ of oak for roofing beams and of pine for kindling and resinous 'splits' to give light. The long 'trying iron' with which buried timber was located is shown in Fig. 66, together with the massive 'fir hatchet' and 'fir rooter'.

To the ecologist the bogs provide a unique field of research into the history of the occupation of the country by plants, animals and man. In the waterlogged depths of the peats everything is preserved, even the tiniest seeds and insects. Centuries of successive summers are chronicled in countless pollens of trees and grasses which the botanist can identify and thereby reconstruct the changes of vegetation from prehistoric times down to the recent past. When man appeared on the scene not only did he leave his pathways and possessions in the bogs, but, as we have seen, he was an agent in their growth. His tools of stone and copper, bronze and iron, evolving in that order, are found lying at levels which can be correlated with the vegetation-history by analysing the pollens that cling to them. Thanks to the labours of Knud Jessen and Frank Mitchell we now have an approximate chronological sequence of landscapes and human cultures in Ireland going back several thousand years.

The pollen grains from the lowest layers of the upland bogs include those of shrubs such as hazel, birch, rowan and thorn, as well as, occasionally, those of cereals and the weeds of cultivation. Evidently the clearings soon became threatened with forest and field weeds, and these companions of the earliest

¹E. E. Evans, *Irish Heritage*, 142; A. T. Lucas, *Bdaloidea*, 23, 71-134.

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been blessed, to protect the beast from milk pilfering fairies and hag witches. Among the taboos associated with May Day are those prohibiting the visiting of wells before dawn and giving away fire; as regards the latter taboo, to do so is to "give away the luck of the farm" for a year. Flowers are placed on the altars of the two medieval churches in the early morning of May Day, and at one time garlands of flowers shaped like a horseshoe were hung on door posts for luck. Souls of the dead are especially feared on Allhallows' Eve, and are placated in the Catholic tradition a day later on the feast of All Souls. The telling of stories is tabooed on Allhallows' Day, and the fairies are said to spoil wild blackberries for future eating with their before dawn depredations. My wife and I invited in a small group of islanders to celebrate Halloween in 1959, and we spent much of the evening having our fortunes told by an old man as it was done on this night when he was a youth; he poured melted lead through a key handle into a pan of cold water and made his prognostications by interpreting the configurations formed by the quick hardening metal.

Whitsuntide is the week beginning with the feast of Pentecost, or Whitsunday, but in Inis Beag it extends to the feast of Corpus Christi and is known as the "kinkish time," when once again evil forces hold sway in the island. Usually the weather is "heavy and close" and very changeable, I was told, and people tend to be irritable and more depressed than usual. Men do not cut their hair, nor does anyone wash themselves, during these 12 days. Although the pookah is always a danger, it is more active at this time than during the rest of the year, and children and visitors are warned not to fall asleep outside or even to sit down on the ground unless accompanied by others, whose presence will thwart any attempts by the demon to twist their limbs. Some islanders will not undertake major tasks or decide on important issues during Whitsuntide. Whereas Christmas and Easter are considered "lucky times," the "kinkish time" is unlucky, and those born then may have the evil eye or be destined to die violently or take a life.

In 1960, Corpus Christi was celebrated June 16th—two days after pattern day and eight days before St. John's Eve. The latter is one of several midsummer celebrations reported from Ireland which mark the summer solstice. Boys gather wood and tend a huge bonfire lighted just after sunset on the common land of Inis Beag, and a few islanders carry coals from it to their homes and fields for protection and to guarantee the fertility of their wives and female livestock. A man complained to me that an infection in his son's finger was caused by the failure of the boy to procure a coal from the fire as instructed. On that evening, the folk congregate outside of their cottages and along the terrace roads to watch the hundreds of bonfires alight on the mainland coast. In the past, cows were driven between twin bonfires as at Beltraine, and barren women and those yet to marry leaped over the dying flames. One of the most brilliant satirical novels of Irish life—both cruel and insightful—is Tracy's *The Straight and Narrow Path*, the plot of which focuses on the difficulties encountered by a vacationing British anthropologist after he writes for a newspaper an eye witness account of nuns jumping a St. John's Eve bonfire.

The legends are several and varied in Ireland about the life of St. Martin (O Suilleabhain 1957:252-261). There is no saint of this name who is of Irish

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